



The Insider

www.senate.mi.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

July 7, 2006

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

Mickey's Letter Bag: Single Gender Schools

Hi Mickey,

You know, when I read letters opposing single gender schools or classes, I'm left to wonder if parents have forgotten what school was like. When I was in elementary school, I was constantly on the honor rolls. Then the hormones hit. All of a sudden, all I could think about was girls. No more honor rolls. Even some of my teachers were distracting!

Single gender schools aren't a panacea, of course, but it certainly removes a HUGE road block to student's performance! I've felt the same way about school uniforms -- it removes a source of contention, making learning the main focus. As you know, Mickey, I'm a very libertarian leaning guy.

But I'm also a pragmatist, and these measures just plain work. So we can choose to either do what's best for students, or ignore what works in favor of the status quo. In the words of Dr. Phil, "How's that workin'?"

Sincerely,
Stu Chisholm
Roseville

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Mick,

I think you're right on this subject. At the Junior High level, the same gender classes would provide improved education by removing the distractions to both sides by "Karla's". In today's "grow up fast" society we don't need 10-15 year-old boys trying to be tough studs and girls worrying about nothing but their hair, looks, and bust line.

On the other hand, this is the time when social development takes place -which is just as important as education. We don't need to turn loose a crop of social misfit nerds onto society.

I think 'moderation in all things' should produce socially comfortable, educated boys and girls that are ready for high school or life in today's society.

Bruce Appel
Shelby Township

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Dear Senator Switalski,

My purpose in contacting you is, first, to applaud you for promoting single-gender schools. I write also to apprise you of some sources that may prove helpful as you collect data in support of your proposal.

As a product myself of all-girls' school education and a 10-year teaching veteran at the same institution, I am well acquainted with arguments both in support of and against the notion of separating boys and girls in school settings. The University of Michigan, some years ago, undertook the somewhat daunting task of chronicling the relative gains of separating the genders for schooling purposes. The short version is this: Both boys and girls stand to gain from single-gender education. Girls make greater gains than do boys, but both achieve better when instructed separately than in co-ed settings.

You may wish to contact personnel in any of the four high-school single-gender schools in Toledo. Granted, these are private, Catholic institutions, but their data are telling. Besides, I am well aware that your proposal supposes that such schools are an option for families. At any rate, the Jesuits maintain St. John's High School (Airport Highway), the Oblates of St. Frances de Sales run St. Francis de Sales High School (on Bancroft). For girls, there is St. Ursula Academy (on Indian Road) as well as Notre Dame Academy (Sylvania Avenue). All four institutions maintain detailed websites. I know that NDA used data from the U-M study for recruitment purposes; you may be able to gain access to that information. The results are impressive.

Best wishes,
Catherine A. Bilow, ABD
Hillsdale College

Mickey's Blog: Governing the Cherokee Nation

As part of my job, I get to visit a lot of schools. I have toured the Michigan Virtual High School and addressed the annual Education Conference in the Upper Peninsula. I have been in hundreds of classrooms. I have lectured on politics to University post graduates, and read nursery rhymes to kindergartners with my coat turned inside out and a Scottish Tartan Wig on my head.

But every time I think I have seen and done it all, I discover something truly inspiring.

I received a call recently asking me to come visit Ruth Cummins' 5th grade class at Cherokee Elementary, which is in the Rivergate Subdivision in Clinton Township. The students had visited Lansing and had some questions about how the Legislature works. I routinely make such visits. Often I divide the class into a legislature, make all the girls senators and all the boys representatives, have them elect a governor, and then try to pass a law. Sometimes I have them vote on whether to start school

earlier, stay later, and have Fridays off. Sometimes I have them choose whether Chicken McNuggets, pizza, or cheeseburgers should be the official fast food of the state of Michigan. I usually decide how elaborate to get once I see how energetic the kids are.

But I was not prepared for what I found.

The students had elected an executive Branch, including a President and a Treasurer, but most of the students were either members of the Senate or the House. This was determined by drawing names out of a hat. They had a Senate Leader and a Speaker of the House. The Judiciary rounded out the three branches of government. Ms. Cummins, the teacher, doubled as the Supreme Court. Her sole power was to rule on the constitutionality of any legislation passed.

When the Cherokee Government was established in the first semester, the Legislature quickly passed a bill granting an extended holiday from school. The President eagerly signed the bill, but the new law was immediately overturned by Chief Justice Cummins. The law violated the Constitution, which consisted of the compiled rules and policies of the school.

Drat! Foiled again.

As the students answered my questions, I was slowly realizing how elaborate, and how realistic, the adventures of the Cherokee Government were. Their project approximated an actual Legislature. The parallels were spooky. The students felt they were doing something wrong, because they had only been able to pass 13 bills the whole year. I reassured them that although there were thousands of bills introduced each session of the legislature, only a couple of hundred actually make it into law. It is intentionally hard to pass a law, which is how the founders designed the system. That creates stability in the law. And their experience exactly reflected that reality.

They were unhappy about how much they fought over legislation and how hard it was to reach agreement. They were embarrassed that sometimes people got into terrible arguments and got very mad at each other. I told them about the times people were so angry that they cried during speeches on the floor. This made them feel a lot better, because again it meant their government was realistic.

After the Court struck down their first effort, the Legislature turned to the top priority for any government body. How will we get paid? This was probably the most realistic part of the entire exercise. They decided that students would earn money for things like completing all their assignments or doing extra credit work.

This is where the class project entered a new level of sophistication. They created their own money and their own economy. The \$20 bill had Treasurer Nick Kutskill's face on it. There was a class store, where students could buy trinkets or used books, the right to a comfortable seat during story time, or even the teacher's seat. They could even buy insurance to render their own seat untouchable.

As the students revealed each new level of complexity to this entire scheme, I grew giddy. The kids were eager to tell me about their experiences, and wanted me to take sides in their disputes over legislation they couldn't pass. The Senate leader had wanted to establish Security Guards at the class store because the Treasurer was unhappy about disorderly transactions and the dangers of financial chicanery.

But the House would have none of it. It is the People's Chamber, after all.

I suggested to them, that sometimes, if the other chamber won't pass a bill you really want, you can hold up one of their bills until they agree to compromise. They were fascinated by the concept of horse-trading, and couldn't wait to try their hands at wheeling and dealing.

I felt a little bad about telling them about some of these cynical legislative tricks. But having experienced gridlock firsthand, these kids recognized the necessity of such tactics to move an agenda. I doubt that most college political science students have as sound a grasp of the intricacies of the legislative process that these 5th graders had acquired.

At this point the students revealed the greatest innovation of all. At the start of the second semester, Ms. Cummins had introduced the concept of taxes. Students were given a tax bill, and a huge battle ensued over whether to have a graduated tax system or a flat tax. Students who had worked hard and accumulated a lot of money were outraged by the concept of a graduated tax, where you pay a higher percentage the more money you have. Those without much money had no problem raising the take from the higher income brackets. There were passionate debates over the structure of the tax system. What could be more lifelike? And as a result of this debate and how invested in the topic they were, the kids learned a great deal. These students knew more about progressive and regressive and flat taxes than most of the electorate. I came away truly impressed.

I am working now to find a way to spread the Cherokee Government to other schools. This is surely the best way to teach government and social studies I have ever seen.

Hats off to Ruth Cummins and her Cherokee Government. Now if only we can get the Legislature to act like those kids.

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Various Times
(Comcast Channel 18)

*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

Coffee Hours

*Since my District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

July 31 7-9 p.m. Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library (35891 Gratiot) Clinton Township	August 7 7-9 p.m. Location: Sterling Heights Public Library (40255 Dodge Park) Sterling Heights
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